

Gen. Secord to Testify Without Immunity Before Panels Investigating Iran Affair



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WASHINGTON — Retired Air Force Maj. Gen. Richard Secord, a central figure in the Iran-Contra affair, has agreed to testify before congressional investigating committees voluntarily and without immunity from prosecution, according to people familiar with the inquiry.

Gen. Secord's decision to cooperate with the Senate and House committees is considered a major breakthrough for congressional investigators. It could pave the way for his testimony in the separate criminal investigation being conducted by independent counsel Lawrence Walsh. The congressional hearings are scheduled to begin next Tuesday, and Gen. Secord is expected to be one of the first witnesses.

By agreeing to testify without immunity, Gen. Secord hopes to take the offensive and demonstrate that his actions were legal and were authorized by senior Reagan administration aides, according to friends of the retired general. Despite the risks of potential prosecution, said one friend, Gen. Secord "feels that it is his obligation to go up there and set the record straight."

Congressional investigators said Gen. Secord is a crucial witness because he helped arrange the U.S. arms deals with Iran and set up a private air resupply network for the Nicaraguan rebels known as the Contras. He previously has declined to testify before other congressional panels, citing his Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination.

Panels Have Been Reluctant

The committees have been reluctant to grant him immunity because of objections from Mr. Walsh, though they probably would have been willing to do so later. The panels already have agreed to give limited immunity to 15 witnesses.

In a status report released yesterday, Mr. Walsh indicated that the scope of his inquiry is broader than has been previously disclosed. The independent counsel said he is focusing, among other things, on allegations that former government officials manipulated senior officials, and that "large sums of public money are unaccounted for." Mr. Walsh previously hadn't asserted that any government funds used in the Iran-Contra affair were missing.

Moreover, Mr. Walsh suggested, without elaborating, that there may have been a conspiracy to trick or "corrupt" officials of the U.S. or other governments. He indicated for the first time that he wants to determine whether any government officials, or other individuals, acting as "officers" of the U.S., may have improperly received or agreed to receive "proceeds of transac-

tions ostensibly for the benefit of the United States."

According to the report, Mr. Walsh's investigators have requested documents and information about the Iran-Contra affair from 13 countries, and additional requests to other governments are expected. The report said that 73 investigators, including agents of the Internal Revenue Service and the Customs Service, have conducted 800 interviews and collected more than 200,000 pages of documents from a total of 10 agencies or offices, including the White House, the vice president's office, the State Department, and the Central Intelligence Agency.

Walsh Discusses Timetable

While a federal grand jury has been hearing testimony since January, Mr. Walsh's report indicated that if he decides to seek indictments he would prefer to wait until the congressional hearings are concluded this summer. "This is not the time to narrow or conclude the grand jury process," the report said. But in a brief meeting with reporters, Mr. Walsh left open the door to seeking indictments more quickly if circumstances warrant.

Lawmakers and Gen. Secord's attorney, Thomas Green, in the past few days worked out the agreement under which the retired general would testify before the committees, according to those familiar with the congressional inquiry.

The panels already have agreed to grant limited immunity to a number of Gen. Secord's associates—including his business partner, Albert Hakim. Mr. Hakim handled the financial arrangements for the private network that first assisted the Contras and later served as a middleman in the secret U.S. arms sales to Iran. Last week, he turned over to lawmakers Swiss bank records and other documents that congressional investigators consider crucial to efforts to unravel the affair.

Under their grants of immunity, Mr. Hakim and other individuals are protected from prosecution on the basis of material derived from their testimony or documents they provide the committees. However, Mr. Walsh still retains authority to prosecute immunized witnesses for perjury or other charges if he can show the charges are based on evidence gathered independently from the congressional panels.

Reagan Talks About Poindexter

Mr. Walsh, repeating earlier warnings to Congress, asserted in his report that "further grants of immunity to central figures in the investigation will jeopardize their prosecutions" and frustrate "the even-handed application of justice."

Separately, President Reagan said John Poindexter, the former White House national security adviser, never told him

about diversion of proceeds from the Iran arms sales to the Contras. "Maybe he thought he was being, in some way, protective of me," Mr. Reagan told a group of reporters, adding that "I did not know that there were any excess funds" until "after the whole thing blew up."